

Mary Wegner
ED693 – District Operations
District Transportation Issues

The Sitka School District currently has a fund balance in the area of Transportation in the amount of \$119,148. This is due to a few factors but mostly because we have a contract for bus services with a local company that works with us to provide an efficient plan for bus routes on our 14 miles of road end-to-end. The local company and the school district are true partners in working for the safe transportation of our students, at an affordable price.

In recent years we have used some of our reserves to purchase school vans, and we have a few high needs students who cannot ride the school bus due to medical conditions so we reimburse the families for costs associated with transporting their son/daughter to and from school. Additionally, we like to have adequate reserves in case we ever need to add another bus route due to changing student needs.

This fall I had an opportunity to meet with the bus drivers and thank them for the role they play in the educational process. As my Mentor Carol Comeau said to me, a student's bus ride to school determines his/her day at school, and a student's bus ride home from school determines how she/he feels about school that day and what is told to families about the day at school. One of the challenges noted about contracting for student transportation is that the bus drivers are not our employees and thus are not part of our district inservices or other opportunities we offer to our staff to be connected to our work as a district. In reality, as noted by Carol, the bus drivers are every bit as influential over a student as is a teacher, and they often know students over the span of their school career including siblings and extended family members. One possible solution is to work with the owner of the contracted bus service and offer them the opportunity to use our school buildings to hold their start of the school year orientation meeting. During that meeting, instead of just meeting and thanking them, perhaps I could share with them a little bit about what we are working on as a district. This would also be an opportunity to provide them with lunch during their training so they hear and feel as important as they are.